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AUTHOR Reese, William J.
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ABSTRACT

This book tells the story of U.S. high schools in the 19th century. The volume analyzes the social changes and political debates that shaped these institutions--from 1921, when the first public high school was established in Massachusetts, to the 1880s, by which time a majority of secondary students in the North were enrolled in high schools. The book also explores in detail the experience of going to school. Drawing on the writings of local educators and school administrators as well as on student newspapers, diaries, and memoirs, the book recreates life in the high schools of a century ago, revealing what students studied and how they behaved, what teachers expected of them and how they taught, and how boys and girls, whites and blacks, and children in various parts of the nation perceived their schools. The volume traces the development of the high schools in major cities on the eastern seaboard to the expansion of free public schools. Although early high schools were condemned by their critics as elite institutions of classical learning, the book shows that high schools in fact were dedicated largely to offering talented, mostly middle-class youth a quality education in modern, practical subjects. (EH)

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